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BY THE SENATE,

JANUARY 16th, 1884.

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By order,

J. M. MILLER,
Secretary.

MESSAGE

—OF HIS—

EXCELLENCY, GOV. ROBT. M. McLANE,

—TO THE—

General Assembly,

IN REFERENCE

TO THE LABOR QUESTION.

ANNAPOLIS:
JAMES YOUNG, STATE PRINTER.

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SPECIAL MESSAGE.

Gentlemen of the Senate and House of Delegates :

In my inaugural address on the 9th inst., I said, "I will recommend to the consideration of the General Assembly needful legislation, placing greater limitations upon the hours of labor of men, women and children engaged in certain employments in this State; and protecting their health and providing for the organization of those *trades' unions*, which have proved elsewhere of such benefit to workingmen, and recognizing those rights of workingmen, which, in less favored countries, have been long since acknowledged by Statute Law, and providing for the collection of those statistics in relation to labor, which will form a basis for future legislation, and enable the General Assembly to establish and preserve perfect harmony between capital and labor, which are absolutely dependent the one upon the other, and both intimately involved in the welfare of the State." In this connection I submit for your consideration, sundry bills, numbered from 1 to 6.

The conflict between capital and labor, from the earliest periods of history, interested all States and communities. To the honor of our mother country, it may be said, that it gave birth to those combinations of working people which were first known in history as "Guilds;" in our day as "trades' unions." In their true and best sense, trades' unions are voluntary associations—non-political and non-sectarian—whose fundamental object is to secure the most favorable conditions for labor. This includes, of course, their efforts to raise wages, to resist a reduction in wages, and to limit the hours of labor, and to regulate methods of employment, or working; and to secure their health and general well-being.

No matter how these objects were regarded in the past, they have now received the sanction of law, and

command the respect and sympathy of the most enlightened communities in the world. The fundamental principles of trades' unions, is the voluntary principle which is essential to their existence; every man being at perfect liberty to join it, or not, at his will. To coerce a man to join, is as vicious as an attempt to interfere to prevent him from joining, if he desires to do so. No one has a right to force one to do, or to abstain from what he thinks right. This voluntary principle lies at the foundation of our political liberty, and is guaranteed to us by our Constitution. It is a principle that all trades' union people should hold sacred in remembrance of the long struggle they have maintained to secure the right of combination.

This right of combination being simply the right of many to do what one has always had the right to do, simply.

The employer has always had the right to do, whether in combination or singly, what he pleases. Without the right of combination, the workingman was at a great disadvantage, and could rarely command a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. With combination, they have accomplished wonderful results, and stand on an equality with their employers; because, like them, they have the means of waiting, and seeking what they deem fair wages.

Most of the evils which formerly attached to these combinations of workingmen grew out of hostile legislation interfering with the natural rights of the workingmen, exciting the latter to reckless violence, as mischievous to themselves as to the community.

This whole subject has received great development within the last ten or fifteen years in Great Britain, and some of the most conspicuous statesmen have illustrated the excellence of this principle of combination, and defined its legitimate sphere of action; and the legislation which I now recommend is substantially the same as has been already enacted by the British Parliament.

I refrain from any detailed discussion of this proposed legislation, because I have confined my recommendation to the limit of actual experiment, where the result has been in the highest degree beneficial to the community. In Great Britain these trades' unions have been recognized by law, and have produced more wonderful results than in this country.

By means of weekly contributions, varying from five cents to twenty-five cents per week—the funds being sometimes separated into trade funds and benefit funds—many thousands of families have been kept from pauperism, and the workingmen themselves have been greatly improved in their domestic and social feelings, and their self-respect as members of the community has been greatly increased.

Those who suppose that these trades' union funds are only used to support workingmen when out of work on strikes, or pending controversies with their employers, would be astonished to learn to what extent those who could not find work have been supported, and how many who would otherwise have been paupers, have been furnished with all the help necessary, until they could find work. The out-of-work fund and benefit or donation fund, are entirely distinct from the strike pay-fund. More than five millions of dollars has been expended by four trades' unions in the two first funds since their first organization in Great Britain, and the results of the expenditure of the latter fund will not prove less satisfactory; more than a million of workingmen are embraced in the membership of these trades' unions, which have an annual income of ten millions of dollars, and a reserve fund of about the same amount. For many years, capitalists, jurists and legislators, objected to this fund, as an illegitimate object of trades' unions, and as constituting a criminal combination, and even after the Statute Law recognized this object as legal, the means by which it was sought to be carried out were adjudged illegal, and the trades' unions were harassed and hindered in all their operations, and their members punished for doing what was lawful for an individual to do, under both Common and Statute Law. But now, the object and the means are declared to be lawful, unless, indeed, the combination be to commit a crime, which would be a crime if committed by an individual.

The legislation I submit for your consideration, preserves this distinction, and makes legal the association which would otherwise be illegal. The rules and regulations of these trades' unions, wherever they exist, are very interesting, and are framed in an intelligent spirit, determining when strike-pay shall be allowed, and prescribing proper methods to obtain advance wages, or reducing the hours of labor, or, indeed, any special benefit sought by workingmen.

The history of their proceedings has vindicated their right and capacity to enjoy the privilege of self-government, and has tended more than anything else, in Great Britain, to insure the triumph of those liberal statesmen who advocate an extension of suffrage. It is very extraordinary that we, in this State, have been so slow in adopting these great principles of reform, which affect so materially the dignity and the welfare of the people.

Of late years, in all trades there has been a reduction in the hours of labor. I know of no commercial or manufacturing establishment in which the number of working hours has not been reduced, either on every day, or on some special day. Excessive work, either from the long time occupied, or overwork while working, is injurious both mentally and physically to the workman, and diminishes the productive power of the worker.

So far as experience goes, the reduction of the hours of labor has proved satisfactory and beneficial to those employed, and to the employer. This applies to all kinds of labor.

The nominal day of work is not the actual day, for the workingman has generally to walk anywhere from one to three miles to his work. It is impossible to avoid these distances between his home and the work.

Eight hours a day, actual work, with the necessary time for dinner, and the ordinary time of going to and returning from work, makes twelve or ten hours a day.

During the dark days of feudal tyranny, and for centuries afterwards, no amount of work that human endurance could stand, was considered too much, and it was not till the beginning of the present century that any real appreciative effort was made in the interest of labor, to protect men, women and children from excessive toil; and to preserve their health.

The details given before commissions and committees of inquiry, showed that thousands of children were physically ruined by overwork, and so crippled and maimed, that they were unable to support themselves, and became paupers. Without pursuing this question further, I recommend, that no child under ten years of age, should be allowed to work at all, and that eight hours should be the actual working day for women and children under sixteen years of age. And that the same number of hours should be the actual working day for

men employed in any factory or manufacturing establishment, making it competent for men to contract with their employers to work for a long period each day.

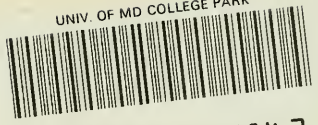
There is a great yearning among workingmen for an eight-hour day, but most employers are opposed to it. My recommendations are made in the interest of the whole community, inspired, I hope, by the belief, that the additional leisure secured to the workingman, will result in great improvement in his moral and physical nature, and are also, in every way, in the interest of the employer.

The right, however, to contract for over-time secured to men, will give ample opportunity to test practically the merit of the proposed legislation.

I recommend further, some amendment to the Act of 1878, chapter 379, which provides a method for arbitration between workingmen and their employers, with a view to make the Act more comprehensive, and to provide for a permanent arbitrator, in cases where voluntary agreement cannot be reached. The bills herewith transmitted, cover all the questions to which I have called attention. I am quite conscious of the differences of opinions which exist in relation to some of them, but I feel satisfied they will all receive your considerate attention without further pressure or discussion on my part.

ROBERT M. McLANE,

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